Visions and Visionary Practices: Medieval to Modern

RELI/MDEM 444and **RELI 644**

Class hours: 1:00PM - 3:50PM Wednesday
Classroom: Hum 120
Dr. Claire Fanger; email: cfanger@rice.edu
Office: Hum 207
Office hours: Tuesday 2-3 PM, or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course examines accounts of visions comparing medieval and modern visionary techniques and processes and relating visionary writings to cultural and personal contexts. Emphasis will be on the visual, tactile, somatic, diagrammatic aspects of the visionary experience. Hildegard of Bingen uses a strongly visual language to describe what she sees in "the reflection of living light" which she distinguishes carefully from bodily sight. She also authored several prophetic books of visions including descriptions of images. Other medieval visionaries received divine news in auditory or tactile ways that may or may not be equated with the bodily senses. The class will look at accounts of such experiences in the middle ages, and in later periods among ceremonial magic practitioners of the occult revival and Golden Dawn. Our focus will not only be on the actual process of production (and reproduction) of visionary experiences, but also on related questions of how visionary knowledge is transmitted and how such knowledge acquires (or fails to acquire) cultural meaning and capital.

Accommodations: Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

Books: You will need to purchase the anthology by Bernard McGinn, ed. *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. Modern Library Classics, 2006. ISBN 0-8129-7421-2 (cited below as "McGinn, *Essential Writings*") (needed from week 2).

Requirements: **Students must attend all scheduled classes and be prepared to discuss all assigned readings**. Since this is a three hour seminar, to miss one class is to miss a week of classes. One absence may be excused with a strong reason or medical note. Missed seminar presentations cannot be made up. If you become aware of a scheduling conflict, let me know immediately. **Do note**: while course content is primarily Christian and medieval, research projects can focus on modern and/or non-Western works in the student's interest area. For assignment descriptions, see pp 7-9 of this syllabus.

SCHEDULE

Week 1. Jan 11: **How to Have a Vision: Modern ideas and practices: Spiritualism. Absorption.** The capacity for visionary experiences, including prognostic dreams, conversations with spirits, and other types of inspiration, is easily developed for most people. Though explanations and visionary epistemologies change with cultural situation, modern practices designed to cultivate visions have some parallels with medieval devotional practices (e.g. meditation, visualization, and crystal gazing, have all had medieval as well as modern exponents).

Reading: Miss X (Ada Goodrich-Freer) "Recent experiments in Crystal Vision," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research,* 5 (1888-89): 486ff (**Canvas**). For a shamelessly popularized neuroscience perspective, explore "Is this your brain on God?": www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=110997741. Some fairly standard techniques for developing absorption or "spiritual communication" skills can be found here: sites.google.com/site/chs4o8pt/communicate and here: sites.google.com/site/chs4o8pt/natural_mediumship .

Week 2. Jan 18: **Early visionary models.** Biblical prophets have long been important to visionary experiences for people in all religions of the book. Late antique ascent visions also provided models across a range of faith confessions for the type of knowledge visions were supposed to transmit. The theoretical problems around visionary activity also develop quite early.

Reading: On the paradoxes of visions of God, read Introduction and part of chapter 1 in Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1997). (**Canvas**) On the history of beatific vision controversies, read Bernard McGinn, "Visions and Visualizations in the Here and Hereafter," *Harvard Theological Review*, 98.3 (2005): 227-246 **(Canvas).** In McGinn, *Essential Writings*, please read the introduction to Section 1, "Biblical Interpretation," and the first 3 extracts from Origen on the Song of Songs, Gregory of Nyssa on the Life of Moses, and Augustine, Sermon on Psalm 41, pp 3-26. Finally (or preliminarily), read the Apocalypse of Paul here: www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf09.vi.ii.html; the first chapter of Ezekiel here: www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=0&b=31 and all of the Book of Revelation here: www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=27.

Graduate students also read: Wendy Love Anderson, "Prophecy and Discernment in Early Christianity," Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp 1-47) in *The Discernment of Spirits* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011) **(Canvas).**

Week 3. Jan 25: **Mystical Experiences and Visionary Disciplines.** There is a long history of understanding monks as direct inheritors of the biblical prophets, and after them, the apostles; connectedly, there is also a long history of monastic visions taking

place in a round of daily practice including recitation of psalms and daily prayer, embedded in a strong biblical consciousness**.**

Reading: Read chapters 1-3 of the Acts of the Apostles http://latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=5&c=1 ; Amy Hollywood "Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism,* ed. Amy Hollywood, Patricia Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) (**Canvas**); Isabelle Cochelin, "When monks were the Book: The Bible and Monasticism 6th-11th Centuries" in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane Reilly (NY: Columbia, 2011) (**Canvas**); and in McGinn, *Essential Writings*, read the Introduction to the whole book, pp xiii ff, and from part 3, "Prayer, Liturgy and "Sacraments," read the Introduction and excerpts from Origen, Cassian and Hadewijch of Antwerp, pp 81-85, 89-96, and 102-104.

Graduate students also read: Isabel Moreira, Introduction and Part I (Chapters1-2, pp 1-75 all together) of *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Mervingian Gaul* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2000).

Week 4. Feb. 1. **Prophecy and Exegesis.** As may already be evident from last week's readings, prophecy and biblical interpretation (exegesis) are intimately linked. Medieval Christians understood the Old Testament as containing prophecies of the New throughout, so knowing how to interpret the Old Testament meant knowing how to read prophetically in principle; but this never meant that prophetic exegesis was essentially unproblematic, in fact the contrary is the case. Here we look at later medieval examples of prophetic and exegetical visions.

Reading: Robert Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent" *Speculum*, 67 (1992): 33-57 and Arnold of Villanova extracts on the Antichrist (source is McGinn, ed. *Visions of the End*, Columbia, 1998, pp 222-225 – seek on **Canvas**). Richard Emmerson, "The Representation of Antichrist in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*: Image, Word, Commentary, and Visionary Experience," *Gesta*, 41. 2 (2002): 95-110 (**Canvas**). For Primary source readings, read Hildegard of Bingen's Vision 11 (the Antichrist vision commented on by Emmerson) from book 3 of *Scivias,* trans. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (Paulist Press, 1990), pp 493-514 (**Canvas**); Visions 1, 2 and 5 from Hildegard of Bingen's last visionary compilation, *The Book of Divine Works*, trans. Matthew Fox (Bear &Co., 1987) (**Canvas**). Images of Hildegard's visions from the Rupertsberg Scivias Codex are here: http://healthyhildegard.com/scivias-illustrations/ (sadly rather small; others can be found by searching google images; if you find a better site for Hildegard viewing let me know. There used to be one).

Graduate students also read: Frans von Liere "Biblical Exegesis through the Twelfth Century" in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (used also last week).

Week 5. Feb. 8. **Divine graphics: Notes, Figures and diagrams.** In Hildegard of Bingen's work it is already evident that standard forms of visual representation are challenged by the visionaries' mode of seeing (as well as by the demands of exegesis itself, perhaps). This class will look at the relation of visions to more abstract or figures, including those of the 12th century Calabrian monk Joachim of Fiore, and the enigmatic figures or "notes" of the Ars notoria, a theurgic prayer system that developed in the 13th century.

Reading: On Joachim, read the Catholic Encyclopedia entry: www.newadvent.org/cathen/08406c.htm and read extracts from Joachim of Fiore from McGinn, *Visions of the End,* Columbia, 1979, pp. 136-40 (**Canvas**). Explore Joachim's figures: www.centrostudigioachimiti.it/Gioacchino/GF_tavoleeng.asp# See esp. the dragon figure (#7), and the cross shaped figure (#5), and English translations of the text of these figures in Joachim readings, p 137 ("the Antichrist") and pp 138-40 ("The new people of God"). On the Ars notoria, read Frank Klaassen, "Brother John's Dilemma" and a portion of following chapter on the Ars notoria, pp 81-113 in *Transformations of Magic* (University Park: Penn State, 2013) (**Canvas**). Also read Michael Camille, "Visual art in Two Manuscripts of the Ars Notoria," in *Conjuring Spirits*, ed. Fanger (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998) 110-139 (**Canvas**). A few Ars notoria "notes" are here: alchemicaldiagrams.blogspot.com/2010/12/ars-notoria.html. Finally, take a look at some of the prayers from the English text of the Ars notoria here: www.esotericarchives.com/notoria/notoria.htm.

Graduate students also read: Marla Segol, "The Letterforms: How did He Combine Them, and Why?" Chapter 5 in Segol, *Word and Image in Medieval Kabbalah* (NY: Palgrave, 2012).

Week 6. Feb. 15: **Visions and Bodily Transformation.** Christian Meditations on the life and passion of Christ gained new vigor in the 13th century with St. Francis and his followers, with stunning effects on the body in some cases. This class looks at the context of St Francis's stigmata and its visual representations through time.

Reading: (**Canvas**); Richard Trexler, "The Stigmatized Body of Francis of Assisi: Conceived, Processed, Disappeared," in eds. Klaus Schreiner and Marc Müntz, *Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter: politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, körperliche Ausdrucksformen* (Fink, 2002): 463-97 (**Canvas**); Arnold Davidson, "Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How St. Francis Received the Stigmata," *Critical Enquiry*, 35 (2009): 451-480 (**Canvas**). In McGinn, *Essential Writings*, please read extracts concerning Francis' vision, section 7: 225-230, and Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*, section 5, 62-171. Also read all of Bonaventure's meditations called the "Tree of Life," in Ewert Cousins, trans., *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis* (Paulist Press, 1978) (seek on **Canvas**).

Graduate students also read: Carla Salvati, "The Camoscio: Relic of the Side Wound of Francis of Assisi" in Jacques Dalarun, Michael Cusato and Carla Salvatti *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies, New Perspectives* (Franciscan Institute, 2006): 79-108.

Week 7. Feb. 22**. **IMAGE / OBJECT PRESENTATIONS**** (see assignment description p 7.)

Week 8. March1: **NO CLASS. DR FANGER OUT OF TOWN**.

Week 9. March 8**: Visionary Induction I: Medieval Dreams and Divine Colloquies.** This class will be the first of two concerned with social and divinatory uses of dreams, and the role of visualizations, context and surroundings, and images in that context.

Reading: Mary Carruthers, "Dream vision, Picture, and the Mystery of the Bed Chamber," Chapter 4 in *The Craft of Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998): 171-220 (**Canvas**); Frank Klaassen, "Subjective Experience and the Practice of Medieval Ritual Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 7.1 (2012): 19-51 (**Canvas**); Tanya Luhrmann, "The Art of Hearing God: Absorption, Dissociation, and Contemporary American Spirituality," *Spiritus* 5 (2005): 133-57 https://www.academia.edu/22028084/The_Art_of_Hearing_God_Absorption_Dissociation_and_Contemporary_American_Spirituality. Our medieval primary text is a medieval memoir involving deployment of dreams for divination; read the visionary experiments of the fourteenth century French monk, John of Morigny, with the Ars notoria in the Book of Visions and the Old Compilation Book of Figures (parts I and III of the *Flowers of Heavenly Teaching*), trans. Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson (unpublished translation available on **Canvas**).

Graduate students also read**:** Steven F. Kruger. Introduction-Chapter 2 and Chapter7 of *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, CUP, 1991) (**Canvas**)

****PROPOSAL FOR FINAL PROJECT DUE****

Week 10. March15: **SPRING BREAK (NO SCHEDULED CLASSES).**

Week 11. March 22: **PILGRIMAGE TO THE ROTHKO CHAPEL** (pending my touching base with the chapel to make sure we don't collide with an event). See assignment description at end of syllabus, p. 8.

Week 12. March 29: **Visionary Induction II. (Early) Modern and Dreams and Divine Colloquies.**

Reading: On crystals in the early Modern period: Frank Klaassen, "Ritual Invocation and Early Modern Science: The Scrying Experiments of Humphrey Gilbert," in Fanger, ed*. Invoking Angels* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2012): 341-366 (Canvas); for primary text look at the firs of John Dee's Book of Mysteries, the

conversations he had with Angels through a crystal and a medium in this edition by Clay Holden http://www.john-dee.org/Primus.pdf (start with the prayer on p. 13 and read the rest). Also revisit the work of Miss X, from week 1. On dreams, read Vincent Crapanzano, "The Betwixt and Between of the Dream", in B. Schnepel (ed.), *Hundert Jahre 'Die Traumdeutung'* (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 2001):232-259 (**Canvas**) and Idem., "Saints, Jnun, and Dreams: An Essay in Moroccan Ethnopsychology" (1975) rep. in *Hermes Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992) (**Canvas**), Read also, Amira Mittermaier, "The Ethics of the Visitational Dream," Chapter 5 in Dreams that Matter (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 2011): 140-172 (**Canvas**)

Graduate Students also read: TBA

Week 13. April 5: **Spiritualism, the occult revival and the Golden Dawn.** The occult revival developed practices rather different from those of Spiritualism. Both require groups of people, but the practices of spiritualism were fundamentally theatrical; séances are public occasions where one person (the medium) takes the stage, others present are audience, and money was to be made. Ritual magic has its adepts, but participants all play a role; yet the lines are not firmly fixed, and some spiritualist practices yielded revelations, and some magicians were also showmen.

Reading: George W. Stocking, "Animism in Theory and Practice: E. B. Tylor's Unpublished 'Notes on Spiritualism'" *Man*, New Series, 6 (1971): 88-104 (**Canvas**) and John Benedict Buescher, "Cornering the market on Fraud: Stage Magicians versus Spirit Mediums," in *Magic Ritual and Witchcraft* 9.2 (2014) (**Canvas**). Also read **Eliphas Lévi**, Introduction to *Transcendental Magic* (published 1855 as *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, translated into English by A.E. Waite, 1896): https://archive.org/stream/transcendentalma00leviuoft#page/n33/mode/2up ; read **W.B. Yeats**' essay "Magic" in the essay collection *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903) here: https://archive.org/details/ideasofgoodevil00yeatrich (read" view on google books also available); for fun, see also the interactive exhibit on Yeats at the National Library of Ireland: http://www.nli.ie/yeats/ (go to interactives, Golden Dawn). Read **A.E. Waite**, "The Importance of Ceremonial Magic," Introduction and Section 1 in *Ceremonial Magic* (1913), here: http://www.sacred-texts.com/grim/bcm/index.htm;

Graduate students please also read Hugh Urban, "The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity" *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (March 2004), pp. 7-25.

Week 14. April 12: **STUDENT SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS ON FINAL PROJECT RESEARCH.** See assignment description at end of syllabus, page 9.

Week 15. April 19: **Aleister Crowley and Dion Fortune: Adepts Melting into the Great Divide.** These readings are designed to give insight into practices and concepts of the most famous of the Golden Dawn offspring.

Reading: Claire Fanger, "Mirror Mask and Anti-Self" in Arthur Versluis, et. al. eds., *Esotericism, Art, and Imagination*, (East Lansing: MSU Press, 2008): 161-182, here: https://www.academia.edu/7219328/Mirror_Mask_and_Anti-self_Forces_of_Literary_Creation_in_Dion_Fortune_and_W.B._Yeats (on Yeats and Fortune), and read Dion Fortune, "Methods of Defence," Chapter 17 (perhaps others tba) of Psychic Self-Defense (London: Rider and Co.,1930) (**Canvas**). On Crowley, read Marco Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley's Views on Occult Practice," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 6.2 (2011), 123-262 (**Canvas**); Short piece on Crowley from *Vanity Fair* (1915) http://hermetic.com/crowley/vanity-fair/aleister-crowley-mystic-and-mountain-climber.html Aleister Crowley, 1-3 of *Magick without Tears* (diaries published posthumously, 1954; Crowley died in 1947) http://hermetic.com/crowley/magick-without-tears/mwt_01.html and **Crowley** *The Book of Lies* (1913) http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib333.html; finally read *Book of Babalon* (1946), magical diary of Jack Parsons, follower of Crowley: http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib49.html

Friday April 21 (Last day of classes) * **FINAL PROJECT DUE BY MIDNIGHT***

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ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

RELI 644 STUDENTS ONLY. DUE: WEEKLY**.**

Every week one grad student will deliver a summary of the additional graduate reading for the next week's class. Come prepared to describe the contents and anything of special interest about the reading as relates to the theme for that day's class. (No formality necessary in the presentation, but please read carefully.)

FIRST ASSIGNMENT: ALL STUDENTS. IMAGE / OBJECT STUDY. Short essay and presentation on devotional image; essay and presentation **BOTH DUE:** Feb. 22

RELI 444/ MDST 444: essay 3-5 pp, presentation 10-15 minutes.
RELI 644: essay 5-7 pp, presentation 15-20 minutes

Choose one image, object, or building to comment on for this presentation. You can use a medieval image, but you don't have to; previous students have discussed e.g. an image of King David in a fifteenth-century Psalter; illuminations of a fourteenth century book on the art of praying; images of the Triple Goddess in Anglo American

Wicca, and images of Santa Muerte in Mexico. For medieval images, many illuminated devotional books are online with images, e.g. in easily searchable format at the British Library: http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/welcome.htm; and the Pierpont Morgan Library, which encourages browsing more than searching: http://ica.themorgan.org/browseByType. Part of the point of this exercise is to show you that you do not need to know a lot about an image or object to begin with to write something interesting about it. You can get a good deal out of the thing itself, with a little reading, so don't be afraid to risk "going out of your field." Use your own resources and research what appeals.

The presentation should do two things. 1. Give background to the image/ object such as date/provenance; history of the text that goes with it (if any); language of said text; artist if known; owner if known; and anything else you can find. 2. Discuss the image itself: what is the image designed to do? How does the framing position the viewer in relation to the subject? How does the image relate to the text? To get an idea of the kind of presentation desired, see this podcast on one leaf in the Woodson collection by Art Historian Diane Wolfthal: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDW5Op5Iwjs

PILGRIMAGE TO ROTHKO CHAPEL/MENIL CAMPUS. ALL STUDENTS. PROBABLY MARCH 22, PENDING CONSULTATION WITH CHAPEL.

Description: We will go together to the Menil Campus, where you will spend a period of time in the Rothko Chapel being quiet, taking notes. We'll discuss the experience afterwards in a different venue**.**

To bring with you: a small notebook or clipboard, writing implement (pen or pencil). No computers.

Inside the Rothko chapel: On entering the chapel, what do you notice first? take notes on what you see. Then take a period of reflection, 10-15 minutes. After your period of reflection in the chapel, what do you notice? What has changed? What does the space seem meant to do? How do the architectural features of the interior enhance the paintings? Can you tie your experience of space and image to medieval readings of the past weeks?

FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS: ALL STUDENTS. **DUE**: March 8, or earlier.

Please email me a well-considered paragraph describing the topic and approach you intend to take for your final research project. This is about research already begun as well as research you might go on to do, so please add a short list of books or readings (3-5 items) that you have already looked at. Feel free to run topics by me as early as you have ideas. Feasible topics will be approved quickly. Suggestions for narrowing will be made if the topic is very broad.

FINAL PROJECT, ALL STUDENTS. Seminar presentation and research paper **DUE:** Seminar presentations are scheduled for April 12; final essay is due on Friday of the last week of Classes, April 21st, at midnight.

RELI 444/ MDST 444: an essay of circa 12-15 pp; presentation 15-20 minutes.
RELI 644: an essay of article length (circa 25-35 pp); presentation 20-25 minutes

The final paper should involve a well-defined, historically grounded and specific argument that embeds a primary text concerned with practices of reception or interpretation of visionary knowledge, or alternatively a devotional, magical, or meditative set of images, objects, or architectural features, closely in its historical or social context. If you wish, you may continue to expand work done for the image /object study. Possible topics include such practices as use of dreams in John of Morigny; automatic writing in Yeats' Vision; the art of Ithell Colqhoun; or ritual in a novel by Dion Fortune or Aleister Crowley. More broadly, you could look at practices over a longer term, for example Tarot card divination in the Golden Dawn, or decoration of graves in New Orleans cemeteries. You can also draw on Asian or African traditions if you are familiar with them, or particular subcultures of religion in America. Modern works of fiction or films with visionary themes are fair game. Use this project as an opportunity to reconnect to the sources of your interest in this course.

Seminar Presentation. On April 12, all students will present work in progress. This presentation has the important function of allowing you to get feedback from others at a stage where your paper is still in draft form. You don't need to be entirely finished. You DO need some information based on research, some good questions, and some sort of thesis. You'll have a further nine days to expand, revise and polish what you've got before the due date for the written paper.

Percentages:

Overall class contribution (participation, preparation, and, for 644 students, reading summaries): 20%
Final project proposals: 5%
Image project seminar and essay rolled together: 30%
Final seminar and research essay rolled together: 45%